

# ***Al's Story***

***From Landsberg, Germany to Ashland, Oregon  
And Back Again***



***Al Willstatter and Betty LaDuke***

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## **From Landsberg, Germany to Ashland, Oregon And Back Again**

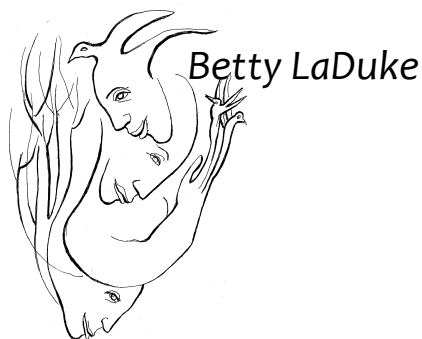
For the past three years (since the passing of our spouses), I listen to Al's stories at my Ashland, Oregon kitchen table. The stories become real when I join Al, his son Kurt and wife Tracy in a 2014 journey to Landsberg, Germany, Al's roots. Since Al was born there in 1925, it could be considered a "historical experience" for us to visit Max Doll, his childhood playmate and school friend of 77 years. Their separation occurred in 1938 when Al and his younger brother Herb were expelled from Germany--- followed by their parents Louis and Luzia Willstatter in 1940. Fortunately this family safely reunited in America. What makes Al's story special is his lack of rancor and his desire to reconnect his family with their Landsberg roots.

I now have the opportunity to meet as well as sketch my impressions of octogenarians Max and Marianne Doll and younger friends Franz and Eva Roessle. Max was a cabinetmaker and also served in the German army and on the Landsberg City Council from 1966-1994. Franz is an attorney and was the mayor of Landsberg for 12 years. While mayor, the history and documentation of the expulsion of Landsberger's seven Jewish families was included in the Landsberg City Museum.

We would also meet Al's longtime friend Cilla Jell and one of her five sons, George, and his wife Sabina at Chiemsee (lake) in the town of Breitbrunn. Surprisingly, we discovered global and professional overlap as artist, architect, and art historian working in New York City, Papua New Guinea, and Nigeria, Africa. They had one of my books on their bookshelf, *Africa Through the Eyes of Woman Artists*.

There were many **prosits** (toasts to life) as we enjoyed the hospitality of these families. Memories were rekindled in a mixture of German and English. My sketching continued as we briefly visited castles, cloisters, the Alps at Garmisch, and Salzburg, Austria, where Al had lived and worked with the US State Department after the war. It is hard to keep track of Al's many adventures, and to fill in some of the gaps he offers anecdotes and a brief outline of his experiences.

We return to Landsberg for our final farewells with the Dolls and Roessles. Marianne Doll insists on retribution. She sketches me. There is no final parting as Al has "passed on the torch" of continuity. For his family Germany's Alps will always mean more than a skiing vacation.







*Al with friends Resi, Lisa, and Max Doll prior to Nazi harassment.*

## **Happier Days**

Max Doll, Oskar Kern, Sedelmaier, Rudy Rahm, and Wolfgang Loib were friends that played together until 1936 when Jews were no longer tolerated in schools and shunned. Landsberg was declared “free of Jews” in 1936. Jews could appear only to facilitate paperwork for emigration if not in concentration camps.

## **Departing For America**

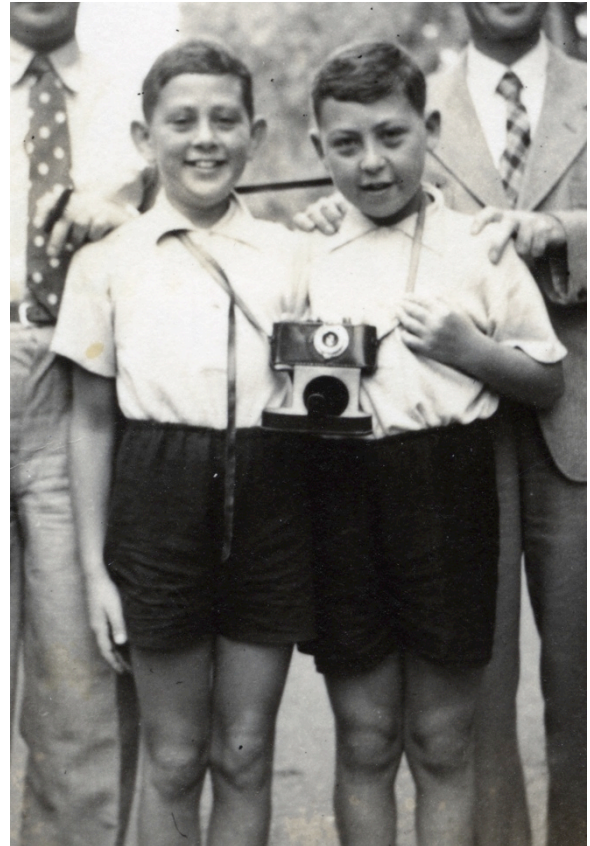
1938. Dad left us off at Hamburg to board the USS Lines ship, the USS Roosevelt. At the ages eleven and twelve we just accepted it as an adventure. Upon boarding, a stewardess sort of looked after us. The food was good, but the sea was rough; eliciting moments of seasickness. I do remember expelling a meal on a fellow passenger. My brother upon arriving in New York wrote about it very graphically in a letter, as well as tearing my new coat while playing shuffleboard.

The boat trip was eight or nine days- with a stop at Cob, Ireland before landing in New York. We were met by a cousin of Dad’s- the Meyers, who hosted us until we entrained for St. Paul, Minnesota, our final destination. While in New York Uncle Leo (Mom’s brother) visited us and presented us with five dollars. Upon boarding the train at Grand Central Station, a kindly porter took care of us, communicating somehow due to our lack of English language skills. Both of us were tagged with consignment badges reading “Weiller and Weiller Livestock Commission, South St. Paul, MN.”

Dad’s first cousins, Henry and Bill Weiller, were two brothers who were our sponsors. As we arrived in St. Paul, the porter spotted Henry and said, “I’ve got two little Kraut kids here for you!”



*Al and Helmut, 1938. Prior to US immigration*



*Herbert and Al, St. Paul, MN 1939, a year later*

## ***St. Paul, Minnesota***

- 1938 Living with Helen, Dad's sister, and husband Sol Geismar in St. Paul, MN.
- 1938 Al and Herbert enrolled at Webster elementary school. Al becomes editor of school newspaper in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- 1940 Parents arrived in St. Paul, aided by Landsberger citizens; Doll, Landersdorfer, Jocher, Maurer, and Weishaupt.
- 1940 Al attends John Marshall High school, plays football and hockey.

## ***War Years and Beyond***

- 1944 Graduation and enlists in US Army. Inducted at Fort Swelling, MN. Ultimately joining 65<sup>th</sup> infantry division, European deployment. Saw combat at tail end of Battle of the Bulge. At the end of hostilities, assigned to Military Intelligence due to language skills.
- 1945 Involved in liberation of concentration inmates as well as concentration camps, Mauthausen, Ohrdruff, as well as Australian prisoners of war in German captivity.
- Screening of German SS troops preliminary to Nuremberg war crimes trials.
- 1946 Used GI Bill to enroll in University of Minnesota, majoring in political science, German literature, and journalism. Met Edie in German department, began dating.
- 1951 Graduated and recalled for Korean "police action". Counter intelligence.
- 1954 May. Signed contract with US Department of State to implement Public Law 203- Refugee Relief Act, with Salzburg, Austria assignment, and winding up the project in Rotterdam, Holland.





Louis Willstatter



Luzia Willstatter



Al's 1938 German Passport, Landsberg City Museum

## ***Family and Social Work***

- 1955 Edie joins Al in Salzburg, they marry Christmas Eve.
- 1956 Return to US, settling in Southern California
- 1958 Edie and Al work with Los Angeles Department of Charities. Doing social casework, Al was subsequently promoted to fraud investigation.
- 1960- 1963 Sons Kurt, Karl, and Steve born in Los Angeles.

## ***Ashland, Oregon***

- 1966 Bought local pool “Twin Plunges”, which they ran and managed for twelve years.
- 1968 Al is elected to Ashland city council.
- 1970 Nasty recall, unsuccessful. Al survived.
- 1972 Defeated for reelection, a blessing in disguise.
- 1974 Helped establish Rogue Valley Transit District.
- 1975-1999 Original chairmen, served district in varying capacities. Proudest achievement.

## ***Reconnecting With Landsberg***

- 1945 At end of hostilities, visits Landsberg, which was relatively unscathed from war damage.
- 1977 Son Kurt spends summer working at Haus Jell on Chiemsee.
- 1986 Visits Landsberg and Chimsee with Steve.
- 1991 Edie and Al revisit Landsberg and for the first time reconnect with Max Doll, a schoolmate and childhood friend who was then a member of the Landsberg City Council. Franz Rossle the mayor made contact to arrange a meeting and press conference. Since then their contact has been continuous. Franz and Eva Rossle visit Edie and Al in Ashland.
- 2014 Sentimental journey turned over the torch and connected next generation to roots.

## ***Hell Yes***

1991- Party at Dolls’ guest cabin, included the Dolls, Roessles, Christl Landersdorfter, Erik Kermeter, Edie, and I. The party started at six and lasted well past midnight. Many pretzels and much beer later, conversation turned to war years. I was asked whether I had shot at Germans. My answer- **“Hell yes.”** It was either me or them, and survival was all-important, with full understanding and appreciation of the stupidity and hell of war. Max Doll, despite being on the other side, appreciated and honored my candor, feeling much of the same frustrations.



## **“Always a Landsberger; Al Willstatter Visits Birthplace ”**

*Lansberger Tagesblatt (newspaper), 7/28/1999*

Son of a Jewish family, Al Willstatter was born in 1925. At the age of twelve he and his brother were forced to leave due to a political situation. In the summer of 1938 Al and his brother Herbert were brought to Hamberg by their father. From there they embarked on a boat to New York. The political situation in Landsberg for the Jewish families was very uncomfortable, but as miserable as things were, Al Willstatter holds no animosity against Landsbergers. “Most of them had no choice but to go along”, he indicted with complete understanding.

- 1999 Al and Edie invited by the Mayor of Landsberg to the Rhutenfrst Children’s Festival, celebrated every four years.
- 2008 Next generation contact. Visted Germany with son Karl. Spent time with the Dolls, Roessles in Landsberg, spent time with Cilla at Chiemsee.

### ***A Real Eye Opener***

2008- At Chiemsee, Cilla was anxious to have us stay in her guest house longer. I had indicated earlier to my son Karl it was his trip, the only stipulation being I wanted to celebrate by 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday in Landsberg. Cilla wanted to know what drew me to Landsberg? I revealed that it was my place of birth, which I was forced to leave due to my “non-Arian” background. She broke out in tears and apologized profusely- a real eye opener for my son Karl. She refused to accept payment for our lodging- which I could not accept- and insisted that I be treated as in the past. She had no complicity with Adolf’s views. Maybe Adolf did me a favor; despite loss of many relatives, he offered me the possibility of a better life.

### ***Public Awareness***

2014. During one of the evening conversations, Max Doll disclosed that Franz Roessle’s folks hid many Jews on their farm, saving them from possible concentration camps or death. This probably explains Franz’s drive to bring forth public awareness of that era, as mayor of Landsberg, although he never mentions it. He seems to be driven to bring an awareness of the past, to hopefully prevent a reoccurrence.

### ***Connecting Next Generation to Roots***

Past memories were jogged by the most recent nostalgic journey and old photographs emerged to document a somewhat historical past. Longtime friendships were rekindled and passed on to the next generation. Generalizations that all Germans were evil were laid to rest. One can find much good, even among evil, if human respect is retained.

- I have no rancor for what happened. People have to remember what happened so it can’t reoccur.
- To maintain relationships with people that understand- that helped us survive.
- Obviously you can’t alter what happened, but you might be able to prevent it in the future.

## **“An Emotional Return”**

***Landsberger Tagesblatt (newspaper), 10/10/2014***



*Time-witness Alfred Willstatter fled from the Nazis and is now showing his son Kurt the home. Family was saved by Landsbergers.*

Landsberg am Lech: Due to an unusual connection, two school friends met this week in Landsberg. Alfred Willstatter, now a US citizen, spent his childhood in the Lechstatt but had to leave with his family shortly before WWII due to the harassment of the Nazis. Despite all this, the 89 year old still accepts Landsberg as his roots.

Alfred Willstatter, a member of a Landsberger Jewish family, was forced to leave Germany 77 years ago with his brother Helmut (now Herbert) to the USA. He now lives in Ashland in the state of Oregon. Prior to this trip with his son Kurt, he visited with his former schoolmate Max Doll, former city councilman and local businessman. Max Doll made the *Landsberg Tagesblatt* (newspaper) aware of the impending visit. Doll made sure that his former schoolmate's son saw the home in which he lived on Vordere Meuhlgasse 191.

Willstatter, who was hosted for dinner by former Oberbuergemeister Franz Roessle, feels despite the Nazi harassment that he is still a Landsberger. He remembers that many people helped his parents after his own departure with brother Helmut to the USA. Landsberg families Doll, Landersdorfer, Mauer, Jocher, Rahm, and Weishaupt made it possible, with support, to get away to Genoa, Italy to join their sons in the USA- literally saving them from incarceration and possible death. By the way, Willstatter brought some of his school workbooks which he makes available for future use of the museum.





### **Dinner With the Dolls**

Max and Marianne Doll, Kurt and Al Willstatter.  
Pretzels, beer, and sausage.



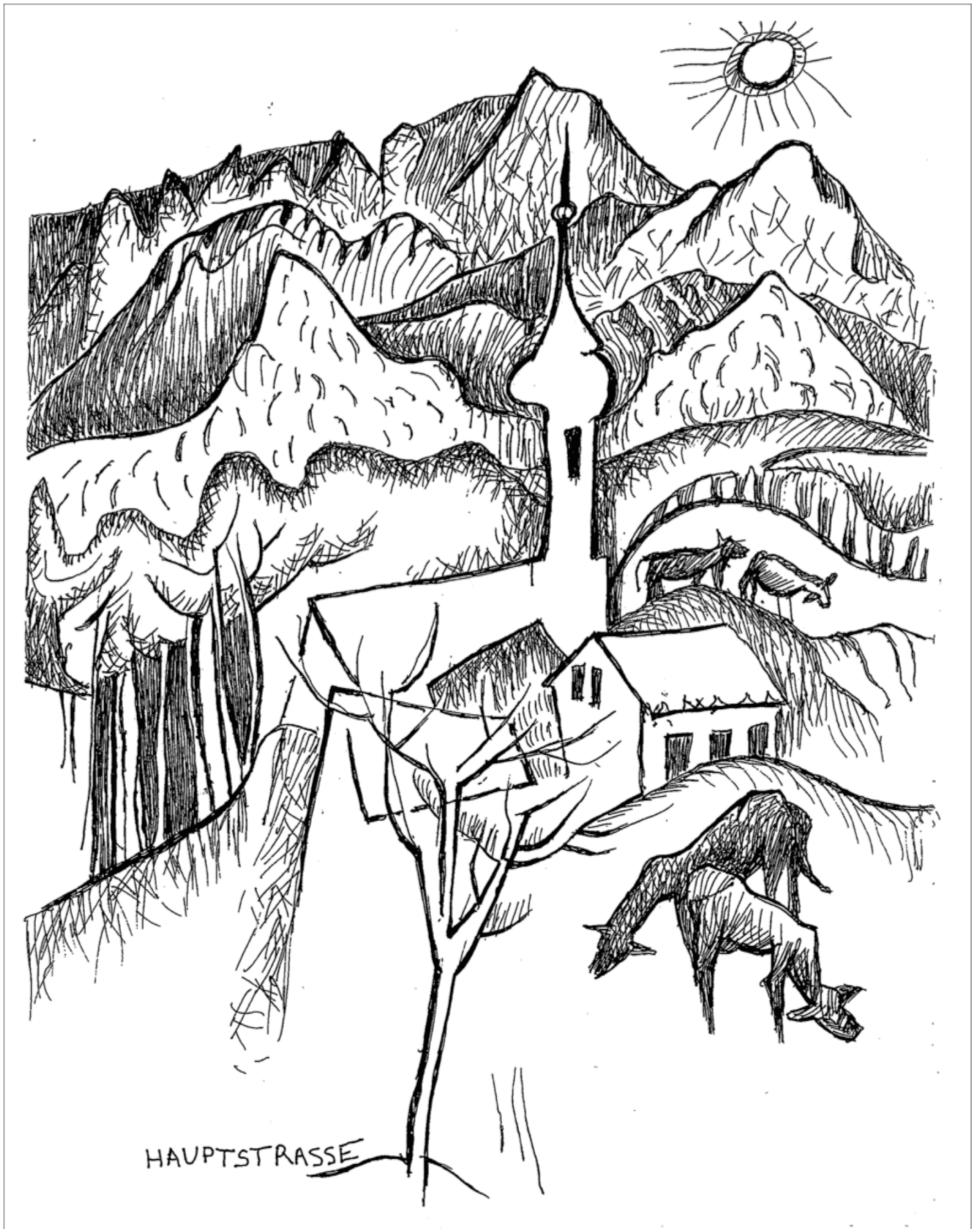
**MAX AND MARIANNE DOLL**  
TO ALWAYS LAUGH AT YOURSELF

**LANDSBERG**





EN ROUTE TO CHIRMSEE  
SLEEPING WITCH ALPS

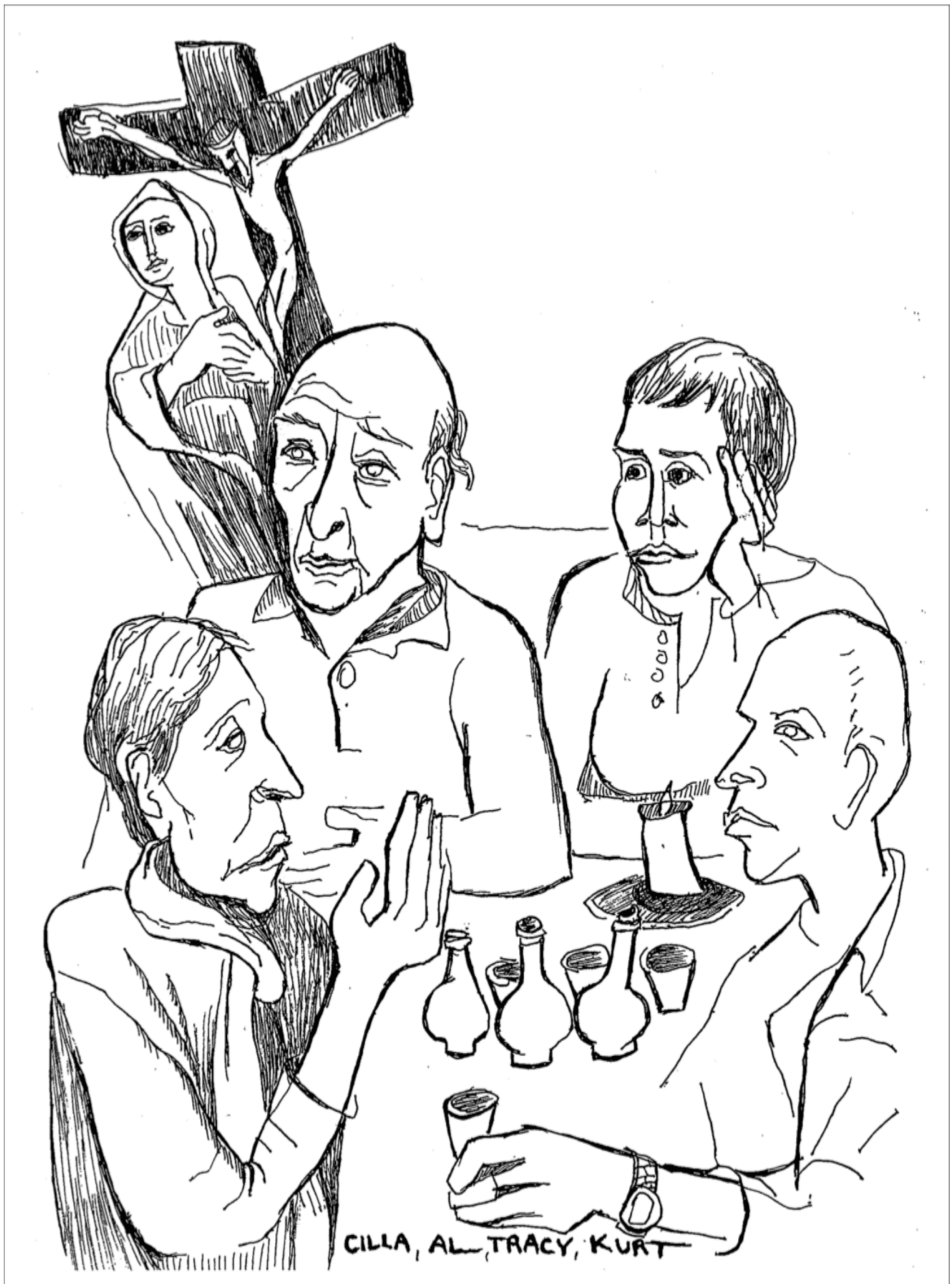


Village Main Street En Route to Garmisch

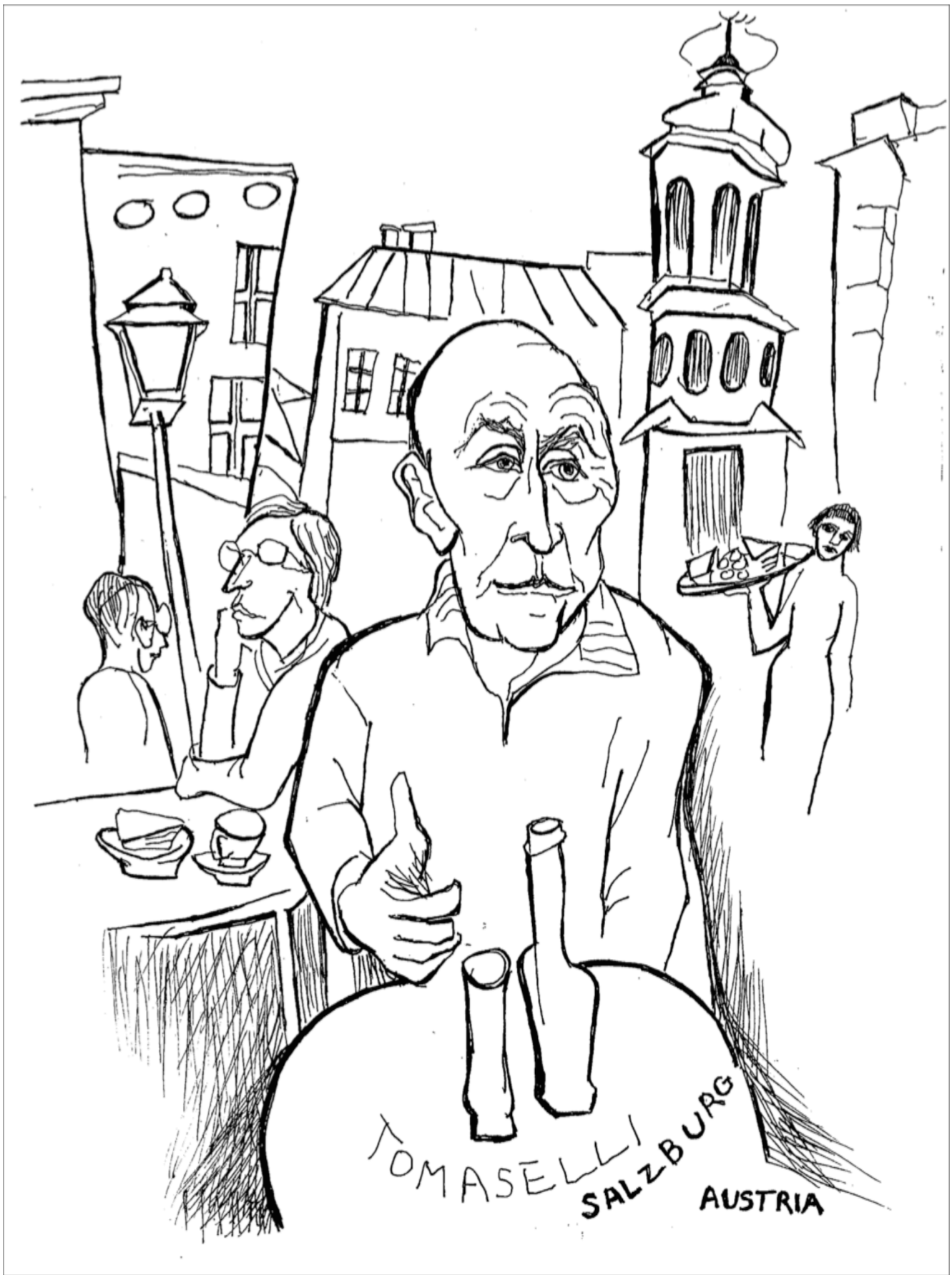




Kurt and Tracy Reconnecting with Cilla Since Their Last Visit in 1983



Sampling Liquor Produced by the Nuns from Cloister Island, Chiemsee



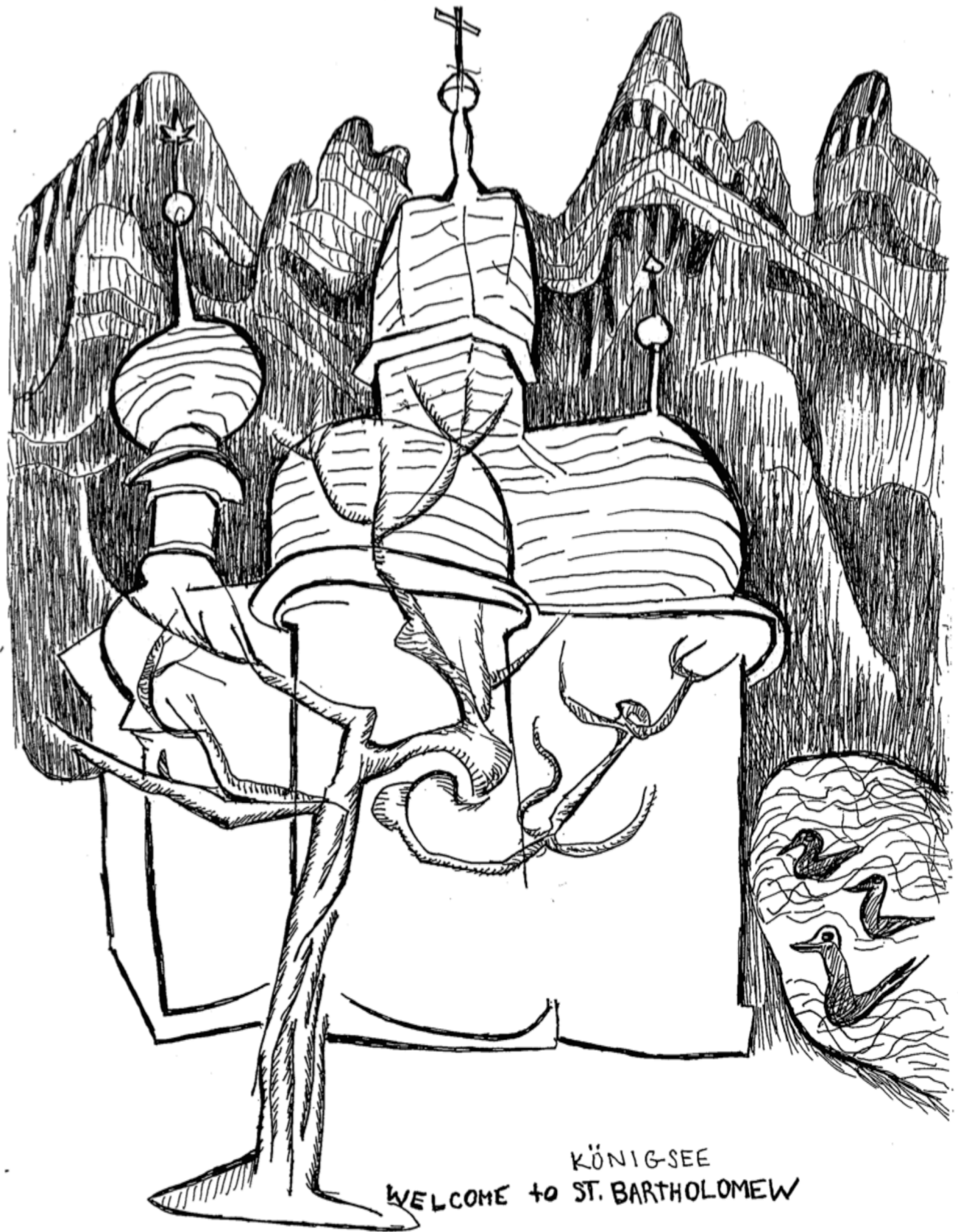
May 1954 AI Signed Contract with US Dept. of State to Implement Law 203,  
the Refugee Relief Act in Salzburg, Austria.





ALL GOOD THINGS COME TO AN END  
AN END TO SOON  
LANDSBERG 2014  
MAX + MARIANNE DOLL  
FRANZ + EVA ROSSLE  
CHIEMSEE 2014  
CILLA JELL  
GEORG + SABINA JELL

Betty LaDuke  
ALFRED WILLSTATTER  
KURT AND TRACY WILLSTATTER



Königsee (Lake)  
Tour boat to Island of St. Bartholomew and the Nunnery





SEEBRUCK  
RESTAURANT WASSERMANN  
**AL AND CILLA JELL**  
WAITING FOR DINNER

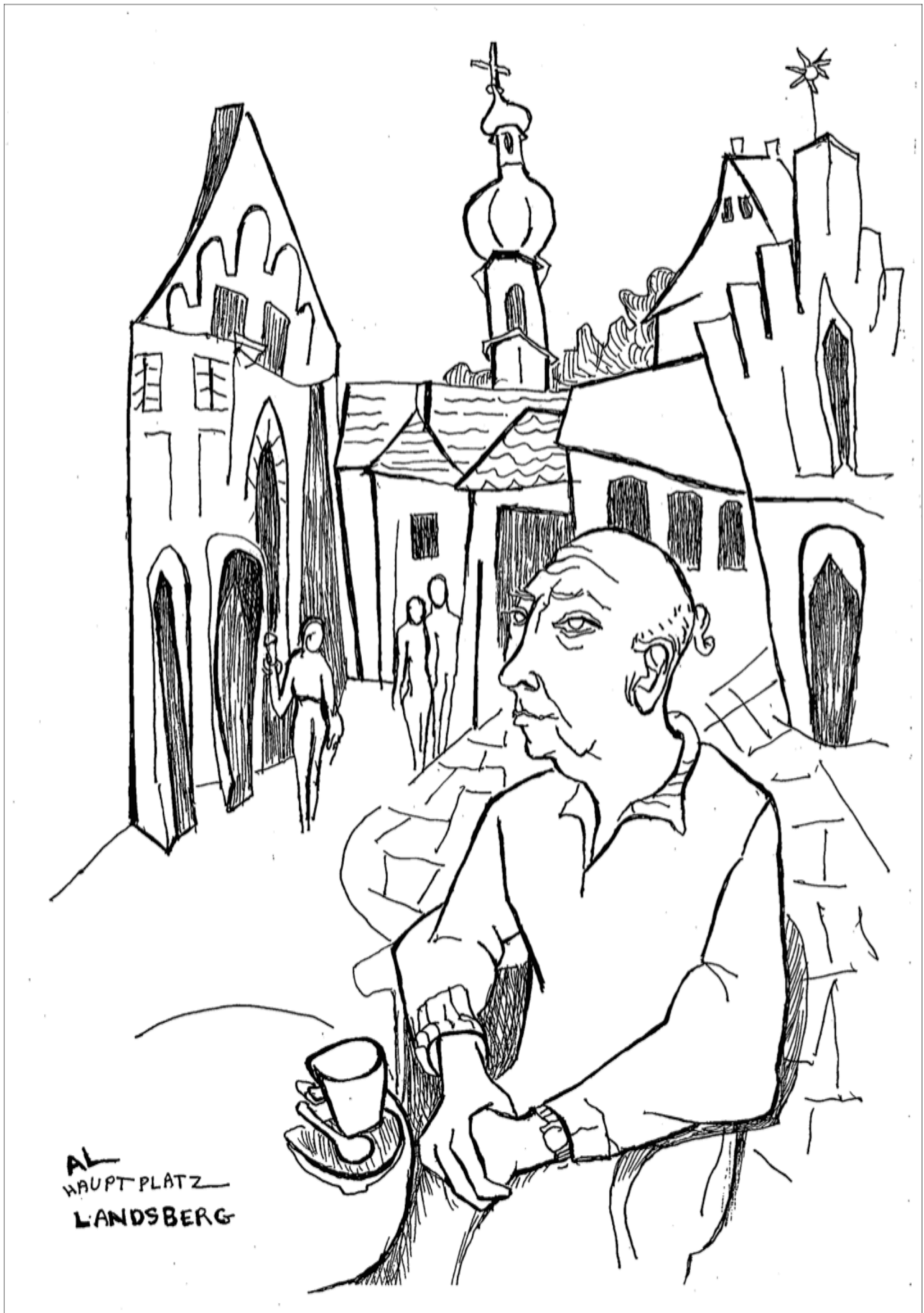
Liver-Dumpling Soup Cured Cilla's Toothache



**The Smoked Fish Dinner Challenge**  
Cilla (with toothache) patiently observes!



Our First Night at Cilla Jell's Guest House  
Reminiscing



Reminiscing at the Main Square

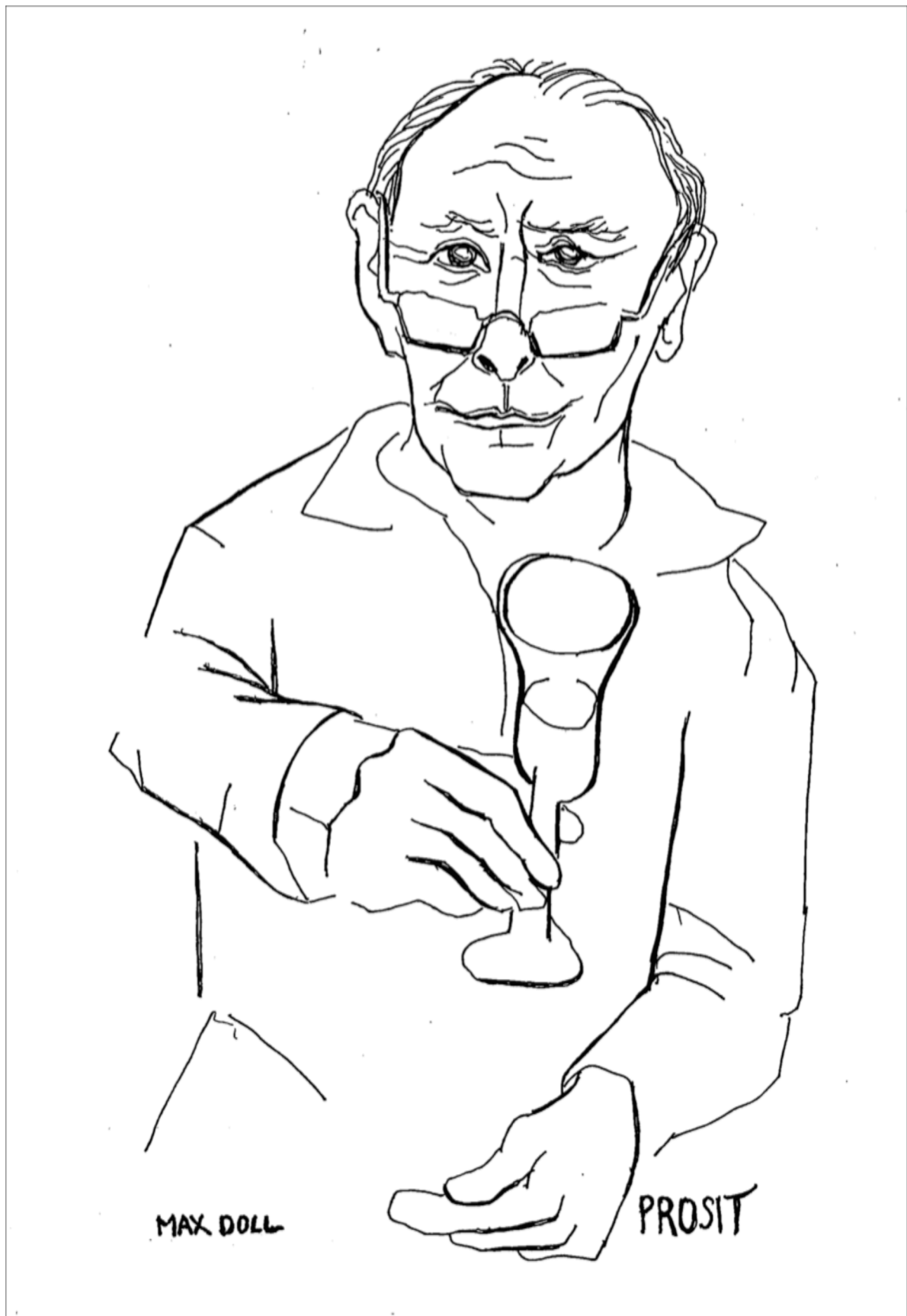


### **Wine, Dinner, And Memories**

Franz and Eva Roessle and their extensive art collection,  
including Franz's wood sculptures.



**An Evening At The Dolls'**  
Sausage, beer, and entertainment.



“All was accepted with full understanding- the stupidity and hell of War.”





In 1991, Al and Edie revisited Landsberg, reconnecting with Max Doll, a former schoolmate and childhood friend (1936). Since then, contact has been continuous.